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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, September 27, 1937.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NOW WE CAN HAVE OYSTERS." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Well, homemakers, now we can have oysters again! The spawning season is over, the oysters have regained their normal size and flavor. Commercial oyster dealers have begun to gather them again. The shucking houses are busy..... What's that? Don't I know September is the first fall month with an "R" in it? Of course I do.

But the real reason why we don't eat oysters from May to September is the one I've just told you. That's their propagating season. If truth must be told, an oyster doesn't know one letter of the alphabet from another. Excepting, possibly, those smart oysters in Alice in Wonderland, that marched along the seashore with the Walrus and the Carpenter.

I seem to have interrupted myself. I was about to ask, did you ever serve your family "pigs in blankets"? Or "angels on horseback"? Or "peacemakers"? I'll translate. Pigs in blankets are oysters wrapped in bacon and broiled on skewers. Angels on horseback are oysters run on skewers, dipped in batter and fried. Peacemakers are potatoes that have been parboiled, stuffed with creamed oysters and shrimps and browned in the oven. I'm sure such a tempting dish would make peace in my household on the stormiest occasion.

What really started me off on oysters today was a letter from our Washington correspondent for the Food and Drug Administration. She writes:

"We who live in the region of Washington, D. C. usually get oysters that are grown in Chesapeake Bay, or off the Virginia Capes. Oysters grow abundantly, you know, along the entire Atlantic seaboard and Gulf Coast from Massachusetts to Texas, and on the Pacific Coast of Washington, Oregon, and California.

"But it was news to me," she says, "that we imported any oysters into the United States. Our own annual harvest in recent years amounts to about eleven and a half million bushels, so I'm told. That's some 63 million pounds of food.

"It seems, however," she continues, "that people living in the southwest use a great many oysters imported from the west coast of Mexico. The industry centers at Guaymas in the State of Sonora. These oyster users in the United States may be glad to know that the Food and Drug Administration recently participated in an investigation of the sanitary conditions under which these Mexican oysters are shucked and handled. The report gives them a good bill

of health. The Mexican health officials and those in the oyster industry are cooperating to the entire satisfaction of officials in this country.

"Speaking of the oyster industry," our correspondent says, "the methods of cultivating, harvesting, and handling oysters vary somewhat in different regions. In New England, New York and the Pacific Northwest, oyster beds are leased from the State and the oysters are cultivated by the lessee. In other sections, oysters just grow naturally on beds or reefs, and can be gathered by anyone who has the proper license. The Food and Drug Administration has had to make extensive studies in all the oyster regions of the country, to establish just and fair legal regulations for the industry.

"The U. S. Public Health Service and health authorities in the various oyster States examine the beds from which oysters are taken for market, and if the beds meet certain bacteriological standards of purity, a certificate is issued to the oyster growers." I'm still reading from my Washington correspondent's letter. "Various municipal and State health authorities inspect the shucking. Employees engaged in handling fresh oysters at the shucking plant are required to pass periodical medical examinations.

"The officials of the Food and Drug Administration have to keep an eye on the oysters as well as on the people who handle them. You see, shucked oysters have to be washed, to free them from sand, bits of shell, and other impurities. Then the washed fresh oysters are graded for size, and quickly packed in cans which are immediately iced. For shipment the cans of fresh oysters are packed in boxes and barrels with crushed ice and rushed to market by refrigerated express. Of course many oysters are also marketed in the shell.

"The step that requires special checking is the washing, or 'blowing' as the trade calls it. This process need not take more than three minutes. But once in a while a packer leaves his oysters in the blower longer than three minutes,- considerably longer than it takes simply to clean them.

"What happens is that the oysters absorb the water and increase in size. Finally they reach the stage where they're so full of tap water that they are what the Food and Drug Administration calls 'adulterated'. It's part of the job of the Food and Drug Administration to protect the public from adulterated food products, to see that purchasers don't pay oyster prices for tap water.

"The natural water content varies in oysters grown in different areas and under different conditions. Notwithstanding the lack of a Federal standard which would, directly or indirectly, limit the water content to what nature put in the oysters as they grow, the Federal officials and responsible men in the oyster industry are continuing the campaign to prevent the sale of adulterated oysters. They believe that the flat taste of a watered oyster does not compare with the delicious, salty, natural flavor of an oyster."

That's all of my letter about oysters. I notice she hasn't said a word about their food value. Let's have a talk on that some other day. Meantime, how about adjourning to the nearest restaurant or cafeteria, and ordering some oysters for lunch. Blue Points on the half shell for me. What's your choice? Oyster cocktail, or oyster stew? The very names of oyster dishes make my mouth water- oyster gumbo, oysters bonne bouche, devilled, panned, grilled, or fried oysters, oysters a la Newburg, curried oysters. I'm told that the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries has a collection of 35 recipes for oyster dishes, and of course anyone who looks will find some of them in any cook book. Isn't it great that oysters are in again?

